



**MONSTER
HUNTERS**

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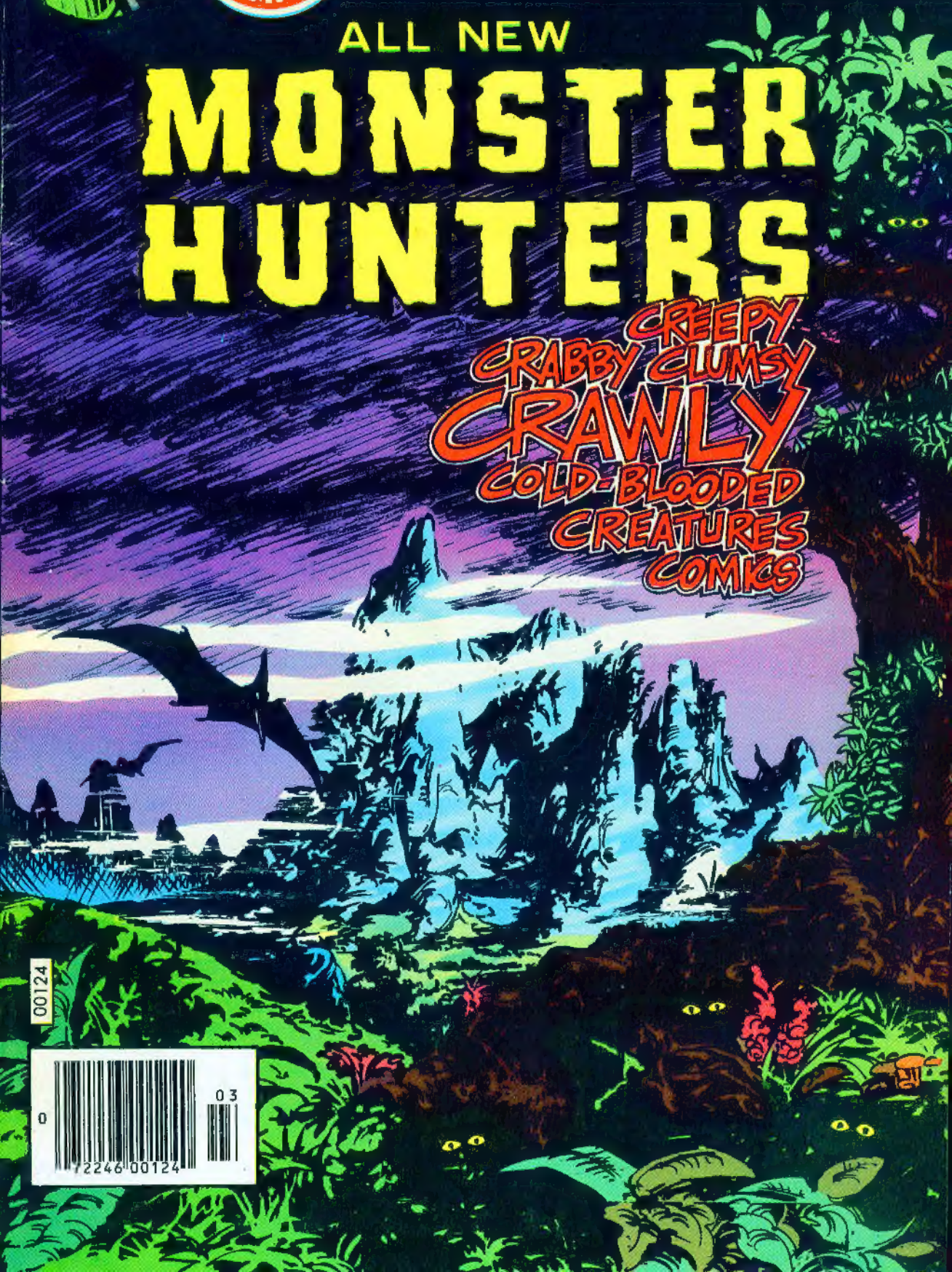
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ALL NEW

MONSTER HUNTERS

**CREEPY
CRABBY CLUMSY
CRAWLY
COLD-BLOODED
CREATURES
COMICS**



00124



OWNING A SECOND RATE CARNIVAL THAT WAS ON THE VERGE OF BANKRUPTCY WOULD DEPRESS THE MOST EASY GOING OF MEN, BUT JOEY JENKS HAD VISIONS OF GRANDEUR WHICH DIDN'T INCLUDE THE SEAMY LITTLE SHOW NOR HIS WIFE, WHO WAS THE...



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MONSTER HUNTERS

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OH, CRIPES. DO I HAVE TO PUT ON AN ACT FOR AN AUDIENCE OF THREE? HAVE A HEART AND GIVE THEM THEIR MONEY BACK.

NOT ON YOUR LIFE, ZHORA BABY, 'CAUSE EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS. LET'S GO OUT THERE AND GIVE THEM THEIR SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS WORTH.

AND NOW FOR MADAME ZHORA, THE SNAKE LADY! WATCH THEM TWIST AND WIGGLE.

JOEY SHUDDERED EVERY TIME HE SAW HIS WIFE GO THROUGH HER ACT. SNAKES REPULSED HIM, PERHAPS NO MORE THAN OTHERS... BUT AT LEAST THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION DIDN'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE CRAWLING THINGS.

IT'S COSTING ME MORE TO RUN THIS SHOW THAN WE'RE BRINGING IN. IF THIS KEEPS GOING LIKE IT IS, WE'LL HAVE TO CLOSE DOWN.

AREN'T ANY OF THE STANDS MAKING MONEY?

LATER, WHEN THE CARNIVAL CLOSED, JENKS COUNTED UP THE RECEIPTS FROM EACH OF THE ACTS AND RIDES.

YEAH, THE FUNHOUSE BUT THAT ISN'T ENOUGH TO SAVE THE BUSINESS. LET'S GO GET A MIDNIGHT SNACK, I'M STARVIN'.

I KNOW WHERE THERE'S A REAL NICE ALL NIGHT DINER WHERE...

FIRE!

THE URGENT CRY SENT A SHIVER THROUGH JENKS' SPINE. NO WORD CONCOCTED SUCH FEAR IN THE CLOTH, WOOD AND STRAW WORLD OF THE CARNIVAL.

BILL, I HEARD AYELL. WHERE IS IT? WHERE'S THE FIRE?

RELAX BOSS, IT'S OUT ALREADY. ONE OF PROFESSOR HOFFNER'S TRAINED DOGS KICKED OVER A LANTERN.

NAH! THE INSURANCE COVERS MY LOSS. IN FACT, I'D PROBABLY MAKE MORE MONEY FROM A FIRE THAN IF I TRIED TO SELL THIS FLEA BAG CIRCUS.

I WAS SO FRIGHTENED IN A SHORT TIME, WE COULD HAVE BEEN BANKRUPT.

GAAA! TAKE IT AWAY! ZHORA, GET YOUR SNAKE. IT'S LOOSE.

DON'T BE AFRAID, JOEY. IT'S ONLY BIMBA. SHE HAS NO POISON AND SHE WON'T BITE. COME TO MOMMA, BIMBA.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU? I TOLD YOU TO FIX THE LATCHES ON THE CAGES. I DON'T NEED SNAKES SCARING AWAY THE FEW CUSTOMERS WE HAVE.

YOU KNOW, THAT MAKES A LOT OF SENSE. WITH SOME OF THE INSURANCE MONEY, I COULD REBUILD THE FUNHOUSE... EXPANDING IT TO NEARLY FILL THE CARNIVAL.

WHAT YOU NEED IS A FIRE. THEN YOU'D HAVE SOME MONEY.

I WAS ONLY JOKING WHEN I MENTIONED THE FIRE, BUT MAYBE IT COULD WORK UNLESS YOU KILL SOMEONE.

NOBODY'S GOING TO DIE. I'LL SET IT WHEN WE HAVE THE BIG PARADE IN TOWN SO THERE WON'T HARDLY BE ANYONE HERE EXCEPT SOME OF THE ANIMALS.

YOU WON'T KILL MY *SNAKES*! THEY'RE ALL I HAVE. THEY'RE MY *BABIES*!

RELAX, WILL YA. I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOUR "KIDDIES".

WHO NEEDS A SNAKE ACT? I'LL FINALLY GET RID OF THOSE SLIMY, ANIMATED ROPES.

THE PARADE WAS AN EVENT DESIGNED TO DRAW THE TOWNSPEOPLE TO THE CARNIVAL BUT ONLY JOEY AND ZHORA KNEW THAT AFTER THE GAUDY SHOW, THERE WOULD BE NO RIDES OR SIDE SHOWS TO SEE.



IS IT SET? DO YOU HAVE MY SNAKES IN A SAFE PLACE?

I'VE TAKEN CARE OF EVERYTHING. THERE SHOULD BE A HUGE EXPLOSION IN EXACTLY... RIGHT NOW!

KA-BLOOM!

THE FIRE FLOWED THROUGH THE TENTS LIKE A RAMPAGING RIVER BUT SOMEHOW THE FUNHOUSE WAS SPARED.

MORE WATER OVER THERE!

TRY TO SAVE THE ANIMALS!

MY SNAKES! I CAN'T FIND WHERE YOU HID THEM!

BABY, IT WOULDN'T LOOK RIGHT IF THEY SURVIVED WHILE THE OTHER ANIMALS WERE BURNT UP IN THE FIRE.

BY MORNING, THE FIRE HAD RUN ITS COURSE AND THE FEW REMAINING EMBERS WERE EASILY DOUSED.

YOU MONSTER! YOU'VE MURDERED THEM!

I HAD TO DO IT. THE INSURANCE INVESTIGATORS AIN'T STUPID. THEY'RE GONNA SUSPECT THAT I SET THE WHOLE THING UP TO COLLECT THE MONEY.

THERE WASN'T ANY ROOM FOR THEM IN MY NEW PLANS. SO YOU'LL WORK UP A NEW ACT FOR THE FUN HOUSE...

I'M A SNAKE CHARMER, JOEY. THAT'S ALL I KNOW.

...ONE WITH NO SNAKES.

THEY WON'T FORGIVE YOU FOR THIS ANYMORE THAN I WILL. THEY'LL HAVE THEIR REVENGE.

CUT IT OUT, WILL YA. YOU'RE ACTING REAL CREEPY. I GOT A LOTTA WORK TO DO AND I AIN'T GOT TIME FOR GAMES.

THE CHARRED REMAINS OF THE OLD CAR-NIVAL WERE CARRIED AWAY AND JOEY INITIATED HIS NEW IDEA.

THAT'S RIGHT, ONE GIGANTIC FUNHOUSE AND IT'S GOING TO BE PERMANENT. IT WILL CONTAIN SPOOK SHOWS, GAMES, WATER RIDES...

FOR THAT, WE'RE GOING TO NEED PLUMBING. THERE IS A SYSTEM WHICH NEEDS CLEANING OUT BUT IT WILL SAVE YOU MONEY RATHER THAN PUTTING IN FRESH PIPES.

THEN DO IT BUT GET STARTED RIGHT AWAY, OR I'LL GET AN-OTHER BUILDER.

DON'T WORRY, MR. JENKS. WE'LL HAVE YOUR SPOOK SHOW UP IN NO TIME AT ALL.

THEY'RE GOING TO START WORK ON... GOOD GRIEF! WHAT ARE YOU MADE UP FOR?

IT'S MY NEW ACT FOR THE FUNHOUSE. I'LL BE THE SNAKE LADY, OKAY? IT WOULD BE BETTER IF I HAD A BOA TO WRAP AROUND ME.

NO SNAKES! THE COSTUME IS FINE BUT YOU DO THE SCARE ROUTINE BY YOURSELF.



NOW, LEAVE ME ALONE.
I HAVE A GREAT DEAL
OF FIGURING TO
WORK ON.

YOU THINK THAT I'M
OVER IT. YOU BELIEVE
THAT I'VE FORGOTTEN
ABOUT HOW YOU **LIED**
TO ME AND
MURDERED
MY BABIES, BUT I
HAVEN'T.

HOURS LATER...



IN ONE WEEK, I SHOULD
BRING IN A THOUSAND IF...
NO, I'LL HAVE TO RAISE
THE ADMISSION. WHIEW,
BUT I'M TIRED.



MY HEAD'S BEGINNING
TO SPIN WITH FIGURES,
AND I CAN'T CONCENTRATE.
I MIGHT AS WELL HIT THE SACK.

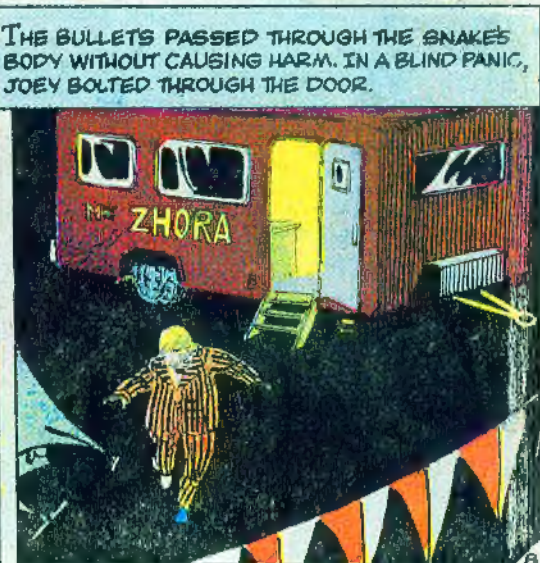


MOVE OVER, ZHORA.
YOU'RE TAKING UP
THE ENTIRE BED
AND I WANT TO GO
TO SLEEP.



WHA... ARE YOU **CRAZY**?
WHY ARE YOU STILL WEAR-
ING THAT DUMB MAKE-UP?

**SSSIST! NO MAKE-
UP, JOEY. SSSIST!**
IT'S TIME TO STRIKE!
SSSIST!



JOEY HAD BURNED DOWN EVERY HIDING PLACE IN THE AREA SAVE FOR ONE AND IT WAS THERE THAT HE SOUGHT REFUGE.

THE HOUSE/THERE IS NO OTHER PLACE TO GO. IF I CAN HOLD OUT 'TILL MORNING, MAYBE THIS NIGHTMARE WILL END IN THE SUNLIGHT.

SHE'LL NEVER FIND ME IN HERE. I CAN WATCH FOR HER AND HIDE AMONG THE SHADOWS.

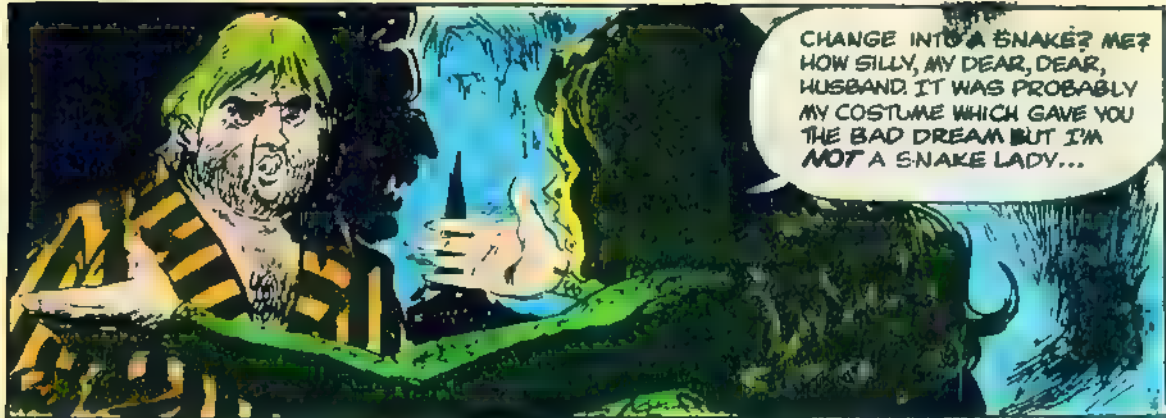
BLAST! THE CONSTRUCTION CREW HAS **CHANGED** THE PLACE AROUND. I CAN'T FIND ANYTHING IN THE DARK AND I DARE NOT TURN ON THE LIGHTS.

I CAN SEE YOU QUITE CLEARLY, MY DARLING.

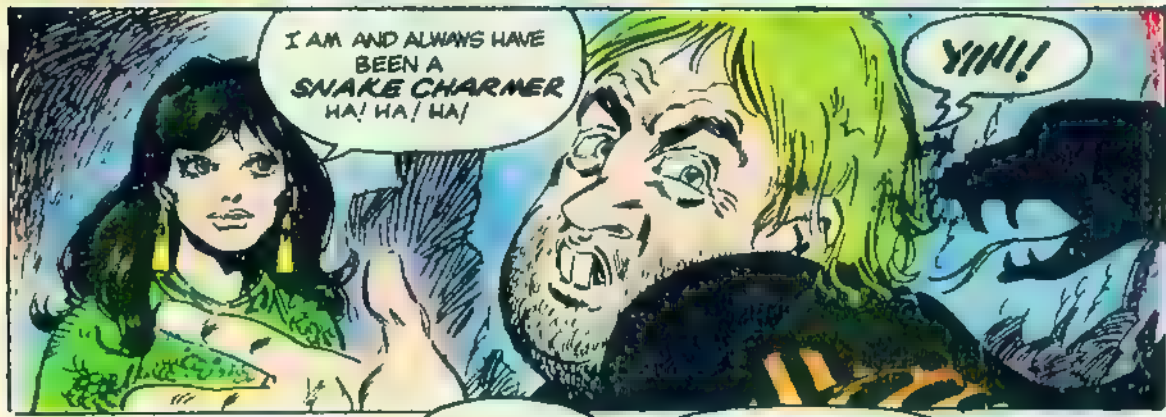
STAY AWAY FROM ME, ZHORA. DON'T FORCE ME TO USE THIS.

WHY DID YOU RUN OFF THE WAY YOU DID... SCREAMING LIKE A MAD MAN?

IT WAS A DREAM! ONLY A DREAM. SURE, I WAS TIRED AND I ONLY *IMAGINED* THAT YOU CHANGED YOURSELF INTO A SNAKE.



CHANGE INTO A SNAKE? ME? HOW SILLY, MY DEAR, DEAR, HUSBAND. IT WAS PROBABLY MY COSTUME WHICH GAVE YOU THE BAD DREAM BUT I'M NOT A SNAKE LADY...



I AM AND ALWAYS HAVE BEEN A SNAKE CHARMER HA! HA! HA!

YINI!!

IN THE MORNING...



THAT'S THE WAY I FOUND THEM. HE WAS DEAD AND SHE WAS JUST STANDING THERE LAUGHING.

IT SEEMS INCREDIBLE. THAT SHE WOULD HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH TO STRANGLE HIM WITH THAT THING.

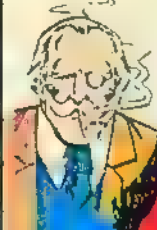
WHAT'S THE NAME OF THAT GADGET ANYWAY? I HAVE TO KNOW FOR MY REPORT.

SHE CLAIMS THAT SHE ONLY CHARMED IT INTO KILLING FOR HER. NUTS.



IT'S USED TO UNCLOG ROOTS FROM PIPES. PLUMBERS CALL IT A SNAKE.

END-



WHEN TOBIAS STARK WENT TO TOWN, THE IGNORANT, BACKWOODS FARMERS AND BOUNTY HUNTERS SNICKERED AT THE AWKWARD, SHUFFLING SWAMP DWELLER! HE NEVER HAD MONEY BUT HE'D SELL RARE MEDICINAL HERBS TO THE GENERAL STORE OWNER... OR BRING IN CUNNINGLY WOVEN CANE BASKETS THAT BROUGHT A FAT PRICE FROM THE CITY FOLK.

HE FEEDS ON EVIL!

LOOKA THERE, BANJO! PURDY JES' PAID THAT DUMMY ALMOST EIGHT BUCKS!

TOBIAS GITS THAT MUCH EVERY WEEK, SOMETIMES TWICE A WEEK!

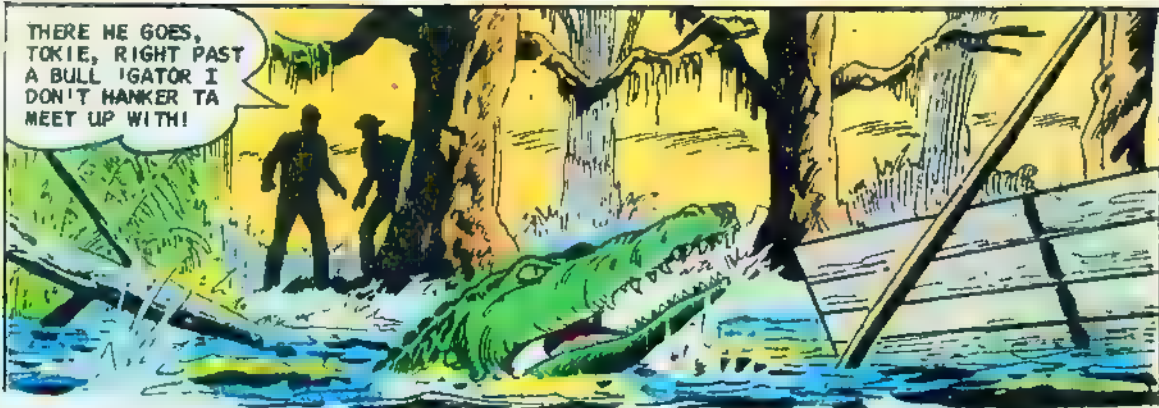


THERE! MY MONEY'LL BE SAFE TILL I GET BACK TA THE SWAMP WHERE NOBUDDY CAN GET IT!



SURE FEELS GOOD BEIN' BACK IN THE SWAMP WHERE NOTHIN' BAD KIN HAPPEN! SOME OF THEM FOLKS IN TOWN MAKE ME FEEL CRAWLY ALL OVER!

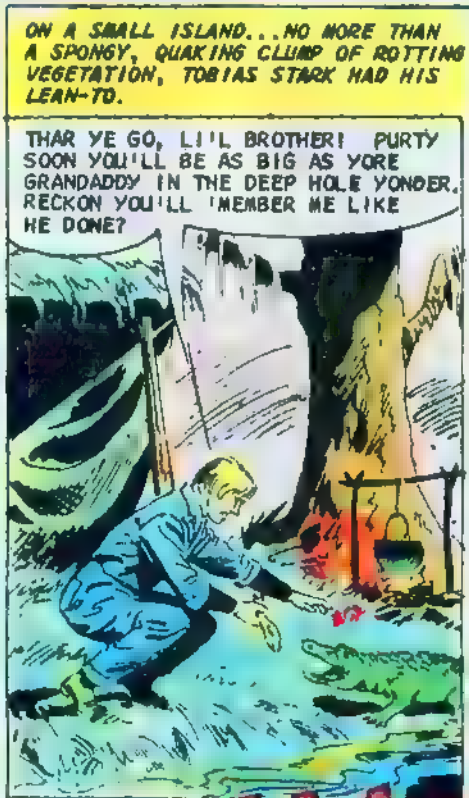




THERE HE GOES,
TOKIE, RIGHT PAST
A BULL 'GATOR I
DON'T HANKER TA
MEET UP WITH!



I BET HE'S GOT FO', FIVE
HUNDRED DOLLARS SAVED,
BANJO! YOU AN' ME IS
GONNA GET US A ~~BOAT~~
AN' PAY TOBIAS
A VISIT!

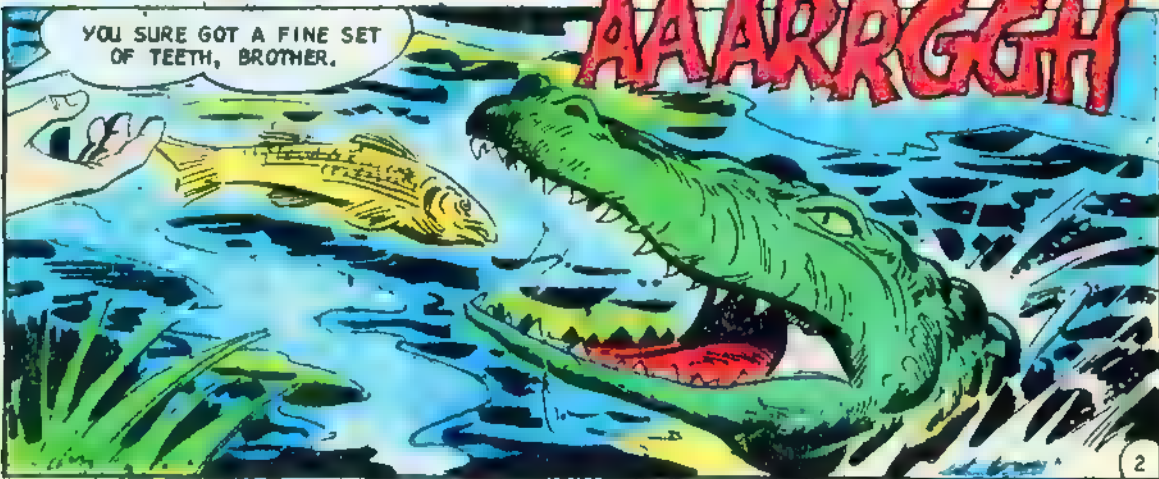


ON A SMALL ISLAND...NO MORE THAN
A SPONGY, QUAKING CLUMP OF ROTTING
VEGETATION, TOBIAS STARK HAD HIS
LEAN-TO.

THAR YE GO, LI'L BROTHER! PURTY
SOON YOU'LL BE AS BIG AS YORE
GRANDDADDY IN THE DEEP HOLE YONDER.
RECKON YOU'LL 'MEMBER ME LIKE
HE DONE?

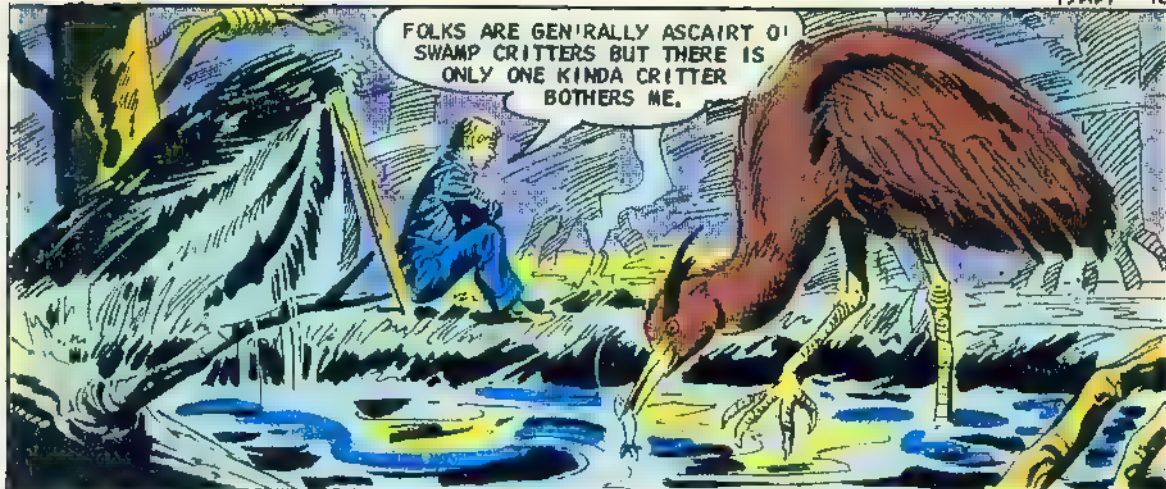


WHERE YOU HIDIN' 'AT,
BIG BROTHER! C'MON,
UP HERE AND GET A
FISH!



YOU SURE GOT A FINE SET
OF TEETH, BROTHER.

AAARRGGH



FOLKS ARE GEN'ALLY ASCAIRTY O' SWAMP CRITTERS BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE KINDA CRITTER BOTHERS ME.

THAT MEANS HUMAN ANIMALS LIKE BANJO AN' TOKIE. THEY WUZ A-WATCHIN' ME COME OUTA MR. PURDY'S STORE. THEY FOLLERED ME TA THE FIRST BIG GATOR HOLE THEN TURNED BACK!



THEY'RE SURE 'NUFF BAD! MR. PURDY SAID THEY ROBBED OL' D. D. CHILDRESS AN' BEAT HIM SO BAD HE CAN'T WALK!

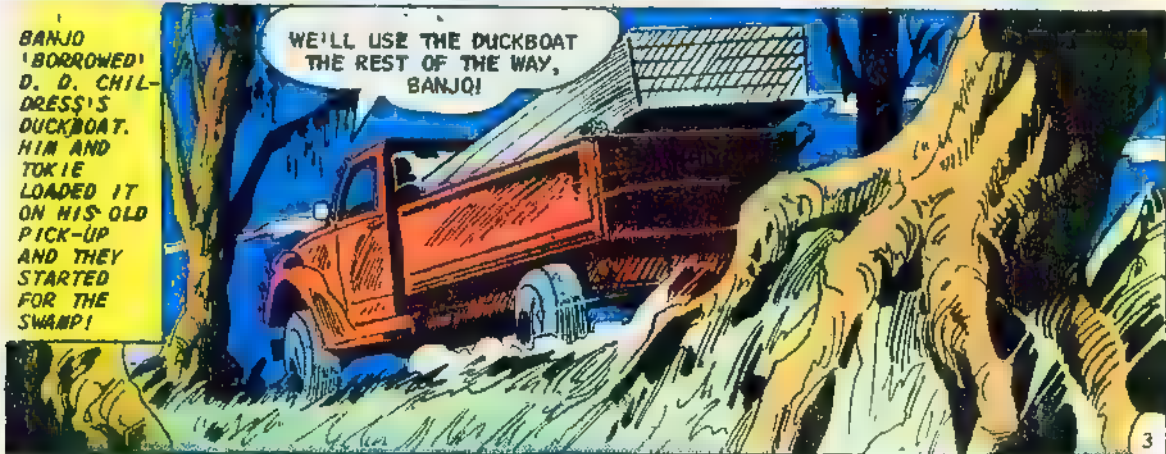


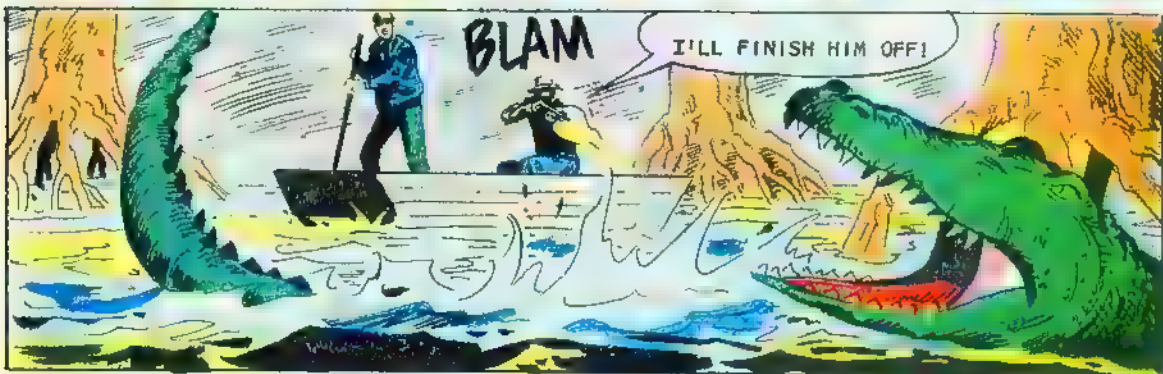
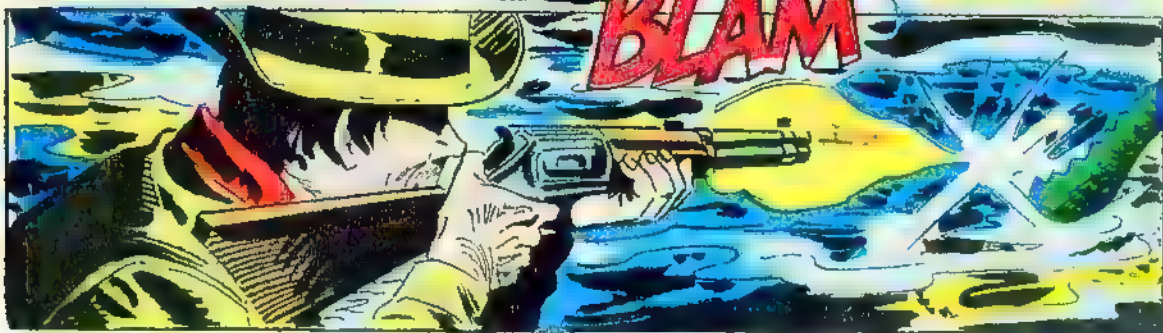
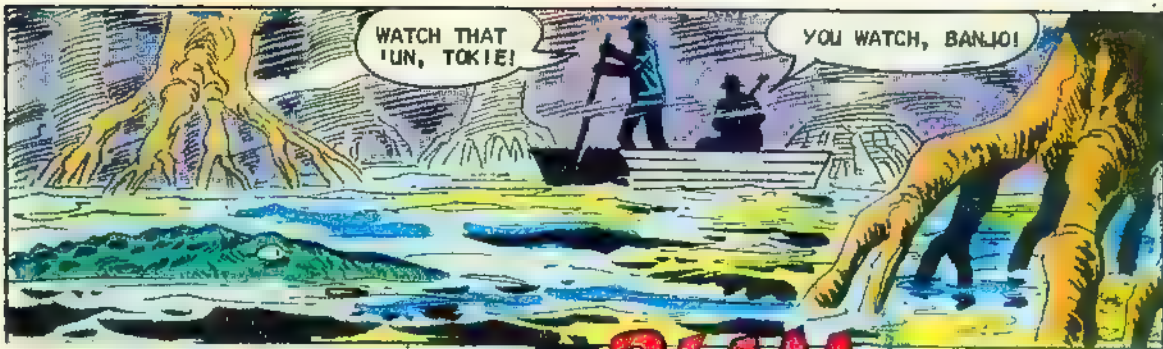
I RECKON ANYTHIN' BAD HAPPENS TA THEM IS NO MORE'N THEY DESERVE! AN' IT'S GOIN' TO HAPPEN, THAT'S FOR SURE!

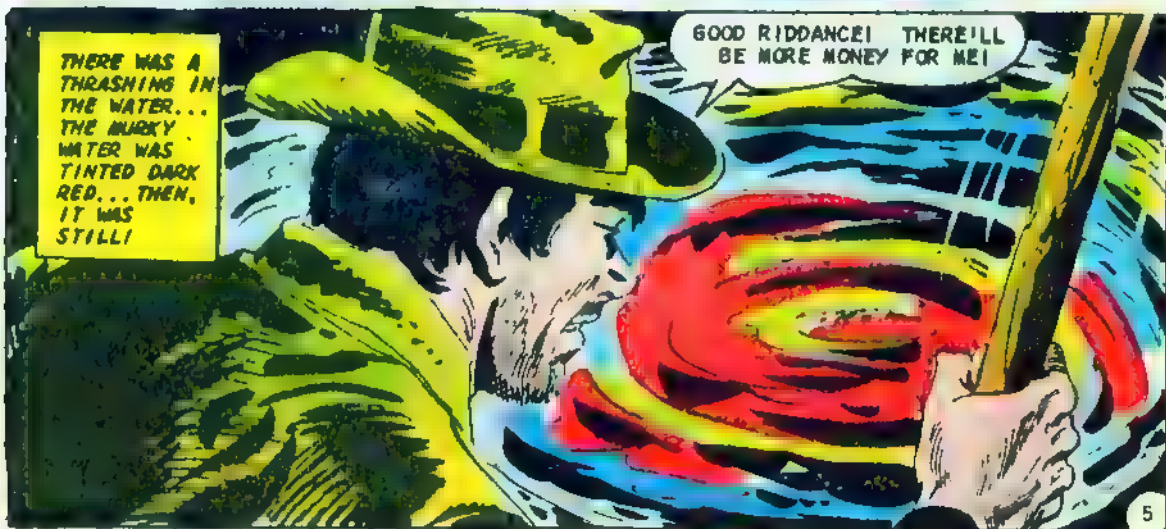
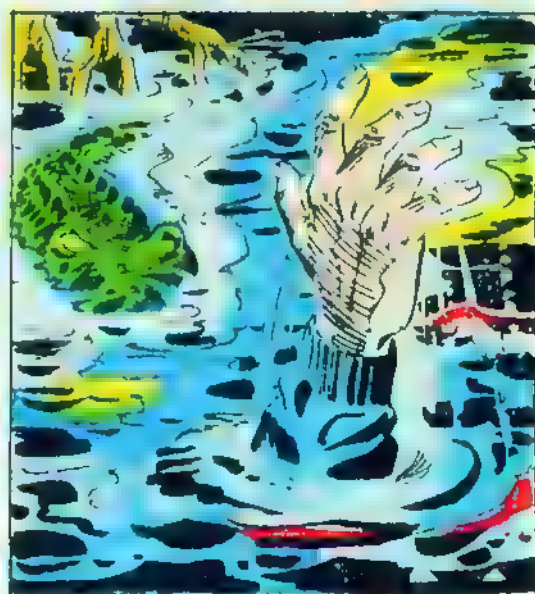
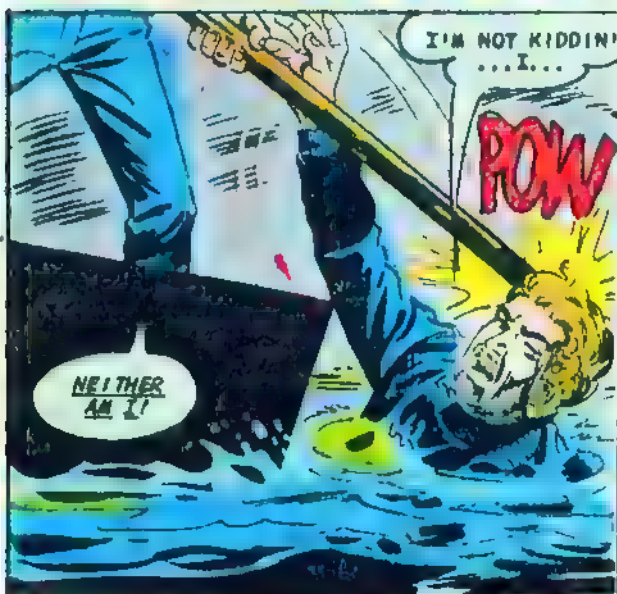


BANJO 'BORROWED' D. D. CHILDRESS'S DUCKBOAT. HIM AND TOKIE LOADED IT ON HIS OLD PICK-UP AND THEY STARTED FOR THE SWAMP!

WE'LL USE THE DUCKBOAT THE REST OF THE WAY, BANJO!









I HEARD A FELLER
SCREAM A MINUTE
AGO, TOKIE.
WAS THAT YOU?

YEAH, YEAH! I WAS
HOLLERIN' FER YOU,
TOBIAS! I COME OUT
TA VISIT
WITH YA SOME.



AS TOKIE LOOKED AT TOBIAS, THE SWAMP MAN
JUST DISAPPEARED. TOKIE ROWED ASHORE AND
SECURED THE BOAT.

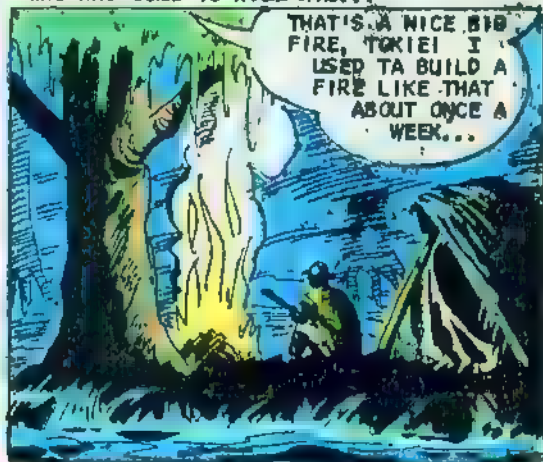
IT WON'T DO YA NO GOOD
TA RUN, TOBIAS! I GOT
A RIFLE... I'LL GIT YA
IF YA TRY TO GET AWAY.

I AIN'T GOIN',
TOKIE. I'M A-
STAYIN' HERE TA
WATCH.



WE'LL KEEP CRIT-
TERS AWAY! I'LL
SEARCH FOR THE CASH
Y'NIGHT AN' GET
OUT BEFORE
MORNIN'!

LATER, TOBIAS CALLED SOFTLY TO THE MAN
WHO HAD COME TO KILL HIM...



THAT'S A NICE BIG
FIRE, TOKIE! I
USED TA BUILD A
FIRE LIKE THAT
ABOUT ONCE A
WEEK...



TOBIAS, HELP ME!

CAN'T DO THAT, TOKIE -- WHENEVER I
HUNTED AN' HAD A LOT OF FOOD FOR
THE 'GATORS, I'D LIGHT A BIG FIRE!
THAT'S THE SIGNAL FOR THEM TA COME
AND EAT! YOU GAVE 'EM THE
SIGNAL... GOOD-BYE, TOKIE.

END

THE SOUND BROKE UPON THE STILL, MORNING AIR LIKE THE DRONING OF SOME HUGE MONSTROUS INSECT...



SILENCE SWEEPED THE JUNGLE BELOW, AS ANIMALS AND INSECTS ALIKE FROZE IN FASCINATED SUBMISSION TO THE STRANGE, COMPELLING INTRUDER.



THE HELICOPTER GLINTED IN THE MORNING SUN, ITS ENGINES PULSING LIKE THE HEART-BEAT OF A THING ALIVE. CLOSER AND CLOSER TO THE GROUND IT CAME AS PROFESSOR ISAAC FROMM WATCHED HIS YOUNG ASSISTANT MITCH COBURN SKILLFULLY MANEUVER THE SILVER CRAFT. THEIR LONG SEARCH WAS RAPIDLY COMING TO A CLOSE, AND THEIR HEARTS DRUMMED IN RHYTHM TO THE THROBBING ENGINES, AS EVENTS THEY HAD SET INTO UNALTERABLE MOTION MONTHS AGO NOW CATAPULTED THEM INEXORABLY AND RELENTLESSLY TOWARD THE INCREDIBLE MYSTERY OF...

THE GUARDIANS!



STORY AND ART BY
DICK PISCOPO

D-7638

BACK AT THE CARLYLE INSTITUTE, THE HELICOPTER'S LANDING WAS BEING CLOSELY MONITORED BY DR. MANCUSO AND HIS ABLE ASSISTANT, MEGHAN BRADLEY.

THANK GOD...THEY'VE LANDED.

I ONLY HOPE FROMM'S RESEARCH PROVES CORRECT. HE'S STAKED HIS REPUTATION ON THIS VENTURE.

IF HE IS CORRECT, IT WILL PROVE THAT ALIEN LIFE EXISTED HERE LONG BEFORE THE DAWN OF MANKIND.

YES, IF HE'S CORRECT. ONLY TIME WILL TELL.

THE HELICOPTER STOOD SILENTLY IN THE CLEARING AS THE TWO MEN UNKNOWINGLY PREPARED TO KEEP THEIR RENDEZVOUS WITH FATE...

WE'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK, MITCH, I CAN FEEL IT! THE ENTRANCE IS IN THIS AREA.

OKAY, PROFESSOR, I'LL GET THE DIGGING EQUIPMENT.

THE HOURS PASSED, AS THE TWO MEN WORKED RELENTLESSLY, VIRTUALLY HEEDLESS OF THE BLISTERING SUN, AND THE SWARMING MOSQUITOES THAT EAGERLY SOUGHT THEIR BLOOD.

PRESENTLY, AS THEY LABORIOUSLY CLEARED AWAY THE TOP LAYER OF SOIL...

WHW! I'VE GOTTA REST, PROFESSOR. LET'S TAKE A BREAK!

WELL, ALL RIGHT, MITCH. YOU REST AWHILE, I'M GOING TO LOOK AROUND.

YOU DO THAT, PROFESSOR! THE OLD FOOL'S GOT US BOTH ON A WILD GOOSE CHASE. BUT IF I WANT THAT FELLOWSHIP, I'VE GOT TO STRING ALONG.

SUDDENLY, PROFESSOR FROMM'S VOICE STRIDENTLY BROKE THE SILENCE.

MITCH...MITCH... COME QUICKLY!

NOW WHAT?

PROFESSOR FROMM STOOD ON A HILL LOOKING DOWN INTO THE GREEN JUNGLE, POINTING SHAKILY...

LOOK, MITCH...THE RUINS! NOT BURIED AS I THOUGHT, SIMPLY COVERED BY THIS DENSE OVERGROWTH.

THEN, THAT'S WHY THEY WERE NEVER SPOTTED FROM THE AIR.

YES, BUT THE DATA I COMPILED OVER THE YEARS POINTED UNMISTAKABLY TO THIS AREA AS THE SITE OF THE ALIEN CIVILIZATION.

AND, OF COURSE, THE COMPUTER AT THE INSTITUTE THAT SORTED OUT ALL THE DATA HELPED JUST A LITTLE!

BACK AT THE CARLYLE INSTITUTE, MEGHAN BRADLEY AND DR. MANCUSO EAGERLY RECEIVED THE ASTOUNDING NEWS...

THEY'VE DONE IT, DOCTOR! THEY'VE FOUND IT!

TELL THEM TO KEEP IN CONSTANT CONTACT. I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD, THE TWO EXPLORERS STOOD IN AWE-STRICK SILENCE AMID THE FABLED RUINS OF THE ALIEN CIVILIZATION. MITCH BROKE THE SILENCE...

WE'D BETTER GET ON WITH IT, PROFESSOR. IT'LL BE DARK SOON.

YES, YOU'RE RIGHT! LET'S SPLIT UP, MITCH, WE'LL COVER MORE GROUND IN LESS TIME.

THE SEARCH WENT ON, AND SOON THE BURNING SUN SLIPPED BEHIND THE GREEN CURTAIN OF TREES, AND THE DEEPENING DARKNESS CLOAKED THE RUINS LIKE A SHROUD...

LOOKS LIKE THE OLD BOY'S REALLY HIT ONTO SOMETHING. I GUESS MY PUTTING UP WITH THE OLD FOOL HAS FINALLY PAID OFF!

SUDDENLY, THE GROUND IN FRONT OF MITCH SEEMED TO GROAN, AND CAVED IN...

WHAT THE...

...HURLING HIM INTO A SUBTERRANEAN CHAMBER.

MITCH... MITCH, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

PROFESSOR FROMM LOST NO TIME IN DESCENDING INTO THE TUNNEL. THE ARTIFICIAL LUMINESCENCE OF THE FLASHLIGHTS SEEMED TO HEIGHTEN THE INCREDIBLY ALIEN ATMOSPHERE OF THE ANCIENT TUNNEL...

LOOK AT THESE WALLS, MITCH... CARVED OUT OF SOLID ROCK, YET SMOOTH AS GLASS!

THEY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SEARED, AS IF BY A LASER BEAM.

YEAH, I THINK SO. PROFESSOR, I'M... I'M IN A TUNNEL. IT LEADS FURTHER UNDERGROUND.

THE TWO EXPLORERS FOLLOWED THE UNDERGROUND TUNNEL, MARVELING AT THE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY REQUIRED TO FASHION SUCH A PASSAGE OUT OF SHEER ROCK...

DO YOU REALIZE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS DISCOVERY, MITCH? IT PROVES BEYOND A DOUBT THAT AN EXTREMELY ADVANCED RACE ANTEDATED MAN BY EONS!

THEIR FOOTSTEPS ECHOED EERILY AS THE TWO MEN RACED TOWARD THE BECKONING GLOW, UNTIL FINALLY THEY STOOD BEFORE A DOOR-LIKE OPENING...

GREAT SCOTT! LOOK!

THEN, DIRECTLY AHEAD OF THEM, STARING OUT OF THE IMPENETRABLE BLACKNESS LIKE A HUGE, GREEN EYE, THEY SAW...

A LIGHT!

YES! IT... IT LOOKS LIKE THE ENTRANCE TO A CHAMBER! COME, ON, MITCH!

JEWELS! MY GOD, THE ROOM IS FULL OF THEM! THERE MUST BE MILLIONS HERE!

HHMMM, STRANGE...

THEY DON'T SEEM TO RESEMBLE ANY PRECIOUS STONE I'VE EVER SEEN...

PROFESSOR... WATCH IT!

THEY SEEMED TO MATERIALIZE OUT OF NOWHERE... SMALL, UGLY CREATURES OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN, MENACINGLY ADVANCING ON THE EXPLORERS...

THE ALIENS! GOOD GOD, MITCH, THEY'RE NOT EXTINCT!

NO KIDDING! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

NO...WE'VE GOT TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM! DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT THIS MEANS?

YES, IT MEANS THAT THIS IS THE BREAK I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR! WITH THIS KIND OF MONEY, I CAN START MY OWN INSTITUTE!

WITH A LIGHTNING-QUICK MOTION, MITCH DREW HIS REVOLVER AND UNHESITATINGLY TURNED IT TOWARDS PROFESSOR FROMM...

MITCH...MY GOD, DON'T...DON'T!

SORRY, PROFESSOR, BUT SUDDENLY YOUR FELLOWSHIP MEANS NOTHING!

AS PROFESSOR FROMM'S BODY CRUMPLED TOWARD THE GROUND, MITCH GREEDILY SCOOPED UP HANDFULS OF GLEAMING STONES, WARILY EYING THE SEEMINGLY CONFUSED ALIENS...

THERE...THIS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO KEEP ME SITTING PRETTY FOR SOME TIME!

SUDDENLY, THE SMALL BAND OF SLIMY CREATURES CAME AT MITCH, THEIR HIGH-PITCHED VOICES SQUEALING UNINTELLIGIBLE SOUNDS...

GET AWAY... DAMN YOU, GET AWAY...

THE CREATURES SWARMED OVER MITCH, GRABBING AND CLAWING AT HIM...

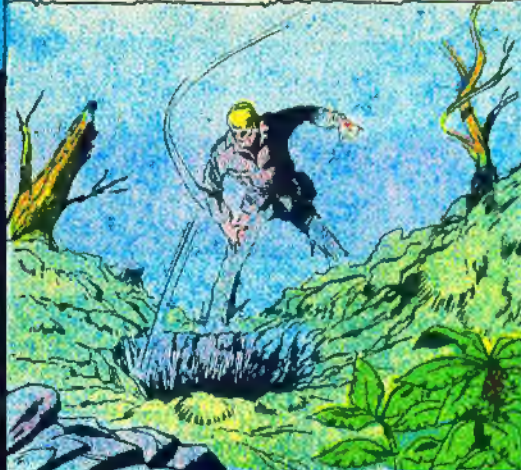
...GASP...MADE IT! I MADE IT!

RUNNING TO THE HELICOPTER, MITCH FEVERISHLY CLAWED AMONG THE SUPPLIES, DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR...

DYNAMITE! THIS'LL TAKE CARE OF THOSE LITTLE MONSTERS!



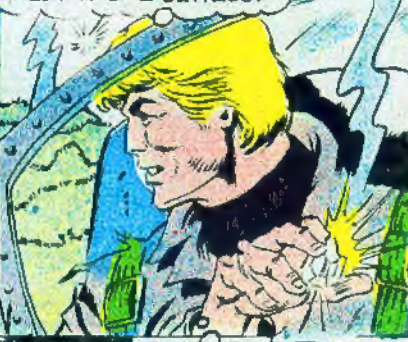
RUNNING QUICKLY TO THE TUNNEL OPENING, MITCH LIT THE FUSE AND...



IT SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD FOR ME TO CONVINCE THE INSTITUTE THAT FROMM'S DEATH WAS ACCIDENTAL. I'LL SAY HE WAS KILLED BY THE ALIENS, THAT I HAD TO LEAVE WITHOUT RECOVERING THE BODY, THAT A HUGE LANDSLIDE BURIED EVERYTHING!

AND NOBODY WILL EVER KNOW ABOUT THE JEWELS. THAT'LL BE MY LITTLE SECRET... AS WILL THE LOCATION OF THIS PLACE WHEN I NEED MORE JEWELS.

WELL, SO LONG, PROFESSOR! I'LL SEE THAT YOU GET YOUR SHARE OF THE GLORY! COBURN CALLING CARLYLE... COME IN, CARLYLE...



NOT BAD, MITCH BOY, NOT BAD.



MITCH'S STORY WAS SADLY RECEIVED BY MANCUSO AND MEGHAN.

ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE, MITCH. IT'S ALMOST TOO HARD TO BELIEVE. DID YOU BY ANY CHANCE RECORD THEIR VOICES ON YOUR RECORDER?



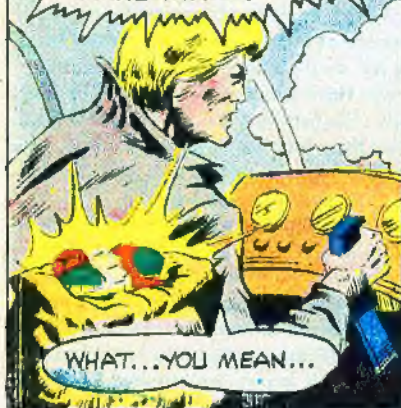
MITCH FELT CERTAIN THERE WAS NOTHING INCRIMINATING ON THE TAPE. THE HELICOPTER DRONED ON AS HE WAITED FOR THE TRANSLATION FROM DR. MANCUSO. THEN...

MITCH! WE'VE GOT THE TRANSLATION! LISTEN, LAD, DID YOU FIND ANY JEWELS?



JEWELS! WHY...WHAT IS IT?

THOSE THINGS ARE NOT JEWELS...THEY'RE SYNTHETIC CREATURES DESIGNED TO ACT AS GUARDIANS IN THE EVENT OF HOSTILE ATTACK. THE ALIENS WERE TRYING TO KEEP YOU FROM EXPOSING THEM TO SUNLIGHT...FROM ACTIVATING THEM...



WHAT...YOU MEAN...

HEY...YEAH, IT'S ON. THEY MUST'VE FLICKED IT ON WHILE ATTACKING ME!



FEED IT INTO THE TRANSMITTER, MITCH! WE'LL GIVE IT TO THE COMPUTER FOR TRANSLATION.

MITCH, THESE ALIENS WERE FRIENDLY... FRIENDLY! THEY WERE TRYING TO KEEP YOU FROM TAKING THOSE...WHAT YOU THOUGHT WERE JEWELS!



I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND!



OH, NO...GOOD GOD...NO... YAAAAA!!

THIS WOULD BE THE END...EXCEPT THAT THE BAG CONTAINING THE "JEWELS" FELL OUT OF THE HELICOPTER WINDOW, SCATTERING HUNDREDS OF THE GLEAMING HARBINGERS OF DEATH ACROSS THE COUNTRYSIDE.

THE WITCHES TAIL



In the beginning there was a servant girl named Tituba who came from the West Indies. She had been steeped in voodoo lore and she told other young women the forbidden secrets of the voodoo cult.

The elders of Salem in the Massachusetts Colony in 1692 ordered physicians to examine the young woman and their verdict was that she and two other women were bewitched. All three were sentenced to be hanged and the verdict was carried out.

But other women in Salem had fallen under the dark spell of voodoo. While ministers harangued the colonists from the pulpit, meetings of the Salem Witchcraft Cult continued in dark, secret places. Elders who had witnessed against the executed witches found themselves suffering from strange maladies and everyone in the colony knew that they had had a witch's curse laid upon them. The witch with this terrible power had to be found and put to death.

One prime suspect, right from the beginning, was Dame Louisa Hodgkins. The widow of a merchant seaman, she sat near her fire, even on the warmest of days, rocking and crooning strange barbaric melodies no one in Salem had ever heard.

Now, Dame Hodgkins was singing those forbidden melodies. The stern minister, Reverend Isaac Menner, called upon Dame Hodgkins, accompanied by the seaman, Billy Beck, and Constable Thomas Hart.

They pushed open the leather-strap hinged front door and saw Dame Hodgkins in her rocker by the fire. None of them had noticed before how thin and sickly the woman seemed. By the hearth, a black cat drowsed, its fur sleek and shining. When they entered, Dame Hodgkins didn't look up but the cat turned her gold-green eyes on the three and Billy Beck hurriedly whispered a prayer.

"Dame Hodgkins, you have been judged by the Committee to be possessed of the dark knowledge of witchcraft. As a servant of Satan, you are an enemy of God and, therefore, it has been decided that you will die."

"I expected you, Reverend Menner. You and these other two fools have come here to destroy me but you arrive too late. Your victim will depart before you can accomplish your foul deed."

She looked at each of them in turn, then at the cat.

"Good-bye, Eliza. They see me for the last time but you will be with them for many years to come."

With these words, Dame Hodgkins died. Aghast, the three stared. And as they did, the black cat called Eliza, leaped to her lap, peered at the wrinkled face, marked by long suffering, then the cat floated to the floor and stalked from the house.

"Well, reverend," Billy Beck said comfortingly, "we did the job. The woman's dead. Now, she'll cast no more evil spells."

"Witches don't die, idiot!" he frothed. "Did you see the accursed cat? Dame Hodgkins' spirit lives in the cat. The feline is her familiar. We must find and destroy that animal!"

Although all of Salem knew the cat was alive and prowling through the town, it seemed immune to harm. The reverend, chasing the cat on a moonless night, fell in Jonathan Smythe's half-dug well and the earth caved in on him.

Billy Beck, 'twas said, expired of an overdose of bad rum but the expression of terror frozen on his dead face made some think his death was from another cause.

Constable Thomas Hart was stricken with chills and fever, dying slowly. His family thought his mind was gone for whenever they left his bedside, a black cat leaped to the window sill outside and watched the dying man. The cat had green-gold eyes.

When the witchcraft trials ended, nineteen witches had been hanged and one pressed to death but few believed that Salem was purged of evil.

For the black cat survived. She prowled the street by night, often sitting in the darkened, abandoned house of Dame Hodgkins. She seemed content. And some swear that same cat still stalks the streets of Salem today, nearly three centuries later.